

## India Partition Lesson Plan

### Central Historical Question:

*Was the partition of India a good plan given what people knew at the time?*

#### Materials:

- India Map PowerPoint
- Copies of India Partition Timeline
- Copies of Documents A-D
- Copies of India Partition Guiding Questions
- Copies of India Partition Graphic Organizer

**Plan of Instruction:** *[Note: This lesson is designed to take place over two class periods. We recommend working through the first round of documents on day one and the second round on day two. If you only have one day, focus on Documents A and B and eliminate Round Two.]*

1. Project the map of India PowerPoint slide. Ask students to examine the map and answer the following questions in their notebook:
  - a. *When was the country of Pakistan formed and why?*
  - b. *What was an immediate consequence of the creation of Pakistan?*

Discuss students' answers. They should be able to discern the following from the map:

- a. Pakistan was formed in 1947 after India gained independence. The map claims that Pakistan was formed in order to give the Muslim minority their own land/state.
  - b. One immediate consequence was massive migration of Hindus and Muslims into areas where they would be the majority.
2. Before continuing with the lesson, take time to discuss with students whether this idea to split India into two countries makes sense to them. Why or why not? What might have been some of the negative consequences of the decision?
  3. Hand out India Timeline, Guiding Questions.

Read the timeline out loud with students and then have them complete the Guiding Questions for the timeline. Review student answers.

*The timeline offers two possible reasons for why India was partitioned. The first has to do with a separate homeland for Muslims and their fear of being a minority in an independent India, and the second has to do with Britain's wish to speed up the transition.*

*Ask students to discuss whether they think the Partition Plan was a good idea, based just on the timeline. Students who think it was a good idea will likely support their*

*argument by saying that without a separate state, Muslims would have been a political minority. Those who disagree will likely refer to the ensuing violence.*

*Note: This is a good opportunity to pause and discuss what it means to evaluate historical actors. Is it fair to evaluate the actions of people in the past, who could not predict the future? This lesson evaluates the Partition Plan based on what leaders knew at the time. Throughout the lesson it will be important to remind students that the goal is to try to enter the mindset of the leaders in 1947.*

4. Hand out Documents A and B and have students complete Guiding Questions. Review student answers and then have students complete Round One in the Graphic Organizer.

*Most of the guiding questions for A and B are straightforward. Students might get stuck on Questions 3 and 4 for Nehru. For Question 3, they might not understand his reference to an “emotional plane.” Although this phrase isn’t necessarily central, it’s important for students to understand that these discussions occurred in a heightened, tense, emotional time (this also relates to Question 4) and that in such moments it can be particularly challenging to press for reasoned discourse and a careful analysis of consequences.*

*The fact that partition was tied to independence made all the difference. Nehru ultimately acquiesced to partition because Jinnah was successful in convincing the British of its necessity.*

*The top part of the Graphic Organizer for Round One is straightforward. Students can go either way for their claim in the bottom part. Jinnah makes it seem as if partition was a good decision given what people knew at the time; Nehru makes it seem as if it was clearly a bad decision given what people knew at the time.*

5. Hand out Documents C and D and have students complete Guiding Questions. Review student answers and then have students complete Round Two in the Graphic Organizer.

*Documents C and D are trickier, and students might struggle with some of the Guiding Questions. The Mountbatten document differs in that it is an interview given 20 years later, after Mountbatten has had time to reflect on the consequences of his actions. He pins the entire debacle of partition squarely on Jinnah, painting Jinnah as the “only stumbling block” to a united India. Mountbatten claims that had he known Jinnah was dying, he would not have agreed to partition.*

*Wolpert, by contrast, blames Mountbatten for his impatience and haste in transferring power. Wolpert is the only secondary source in the set, which raises interesting questions about relative reliability. On the one hand, he has the perspective gained from historical distance and scholarly analysis. On the other hand, students can discuss whether Wolpert is in a position to evaluate the motives of the British. Who makes a more convincing case –Mountbatten or Wolpert? Obviously, the students need more information to engage in this debate, but it raises important questions about the evaluation of historical actors and sources.*

*In the Graphic Organizer, students should write that Mountbatten makes the case that it was a good decision, given what people knew at the time (they thought Jinnah would*

*continue to live); and Wolpert implies that it was a bad idea (that the British knew enough at the time to have foreseen that partition would have negative consequences).*

6. Whole class discussion: Students share their final claims from the Graphic Organizer.

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Citations:

Jinnah, M.A. (1940, March). Presidential address.

Presented at the Muslim League Lahore, India. Retrieved from

[http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00islamlinks/txt\\_jinnah\\_lahore\\_1940.html](http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00islamlinks/txt_jinnah_lahore_1940.html)

Nehru, J. (1946). *The Discovery of India*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Collins, L. and Lapierre, D. (1982). *Mountbatten and the Partition of India*.

U.K.: Garlandfold LTD. (pp. 57-58).

<http://www.apnaorg.com/books/english/mountbatten-partition/book.php?fldr=book>

Wolpert, S. (2006). *Shameful Flight: The Last Years of the British*

*Empire in India*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Inc. (p. 1-2).

## Timeline

By the end of World War I in 1919, Indian leaders began fighting for independence from Great Britain. At this time, two major ethnic populations existed in India: Hindus, who were the great majority, and Muslims, who were a minority. Many Hindus hoped that India would remain united once the British left. But some Muslims, especially leader Muhammad Ali Jinnah, worried about being a minority. When the British finally left India in 1947, they divided the Indian subcontinent, creating an independent India and a new state called Pakistan for Muslims. They called this division the Partition Plan.

**1930s:** The idea for a separate homeland for Muslims is introduced.

**1935:** Great Britain reforms policies to grant greater independence to Indians. Muslims worry they will be a permanent minority in a fully independent India.

**1940:** Muslim leader Jinnah calls for the establishment of Pakistan as a separate state for Indian's Muslims.

**1944:** Hindu leaders fail to convince Jinnah to keep India unified.

**Aug. 1946:** Hindus and Muslims clash in Calcutta over formation of interim government. Approximately 5,000 die.

**March 1947:** The British Government sends Louis Mountbatten to India to determine a plan for transferring power to Indians before June 1948.

**June 3, 1947:** Mountbatten announces the Partition Plan and speeds up the transfer of power by ten months.

**Aug. 14-15, 1947:** Transfer of Power: India gains independence from Great Britain.

**Aug. 16-17, 1947:** Decision for partition boundaries is released and published.

Migration and violence due to partition continues until the end of 1947. Approximately 15 million people migrated, and between 300,000 and one million refugees lost their lives during partition.

## Document A: Muhammad Ali Jinnah (Modified)

*The passage below is a speech by Muhammad Ali Jinnah, who was known as the founder of Pakistan. Jinnah served as president of the All-India Muslim League from 1913 until Pakistan's independence on August 15, 1947. The speech became known as the "Two Nations" speech and was delivered at the Muslim League's annual meeting in 1940.*

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If the British Government really wants to secure the peace and happiness of the people of this Subcontinent, the only course open to us is to allow Hindus and Muslims separate homelands, by dividing India into "autonomous national States."

It is extremely difficult to appreciate why our Hindu friends fail to understand the real nature of Islam and Hinduism. They are not religions in the strict sense of the word, but are, in fact, different and distinct social orders. It is a dream that the Hindus and Muslims can ever evolve a common nationality. This misconception of one Indian nation has gone far beyond the limits and is the cause of most of our troubles and will lead India to destruction, if we fail to revise our notions in time. The Hindus and the Muslims belong to two different religious philosophies, social customs, and literature. They neither intermarry, nor inter-dine together, and indeed they belong to two different civilizations, which are based mainly on conflicting ideas and conceptions. To **yoke** together two such nations under a single State, one as a numerical minority and the other as a majority, must lead to growing discontent and the final destruction of the government of such a State.

Muslim India cannot accept any Constitution that will lead to a Hindu majority Government.

The Muslims are a nation according to any definition of a nation, and they must have their homelands, their territory and their State. We wish to live in peace and harmony with our neighbors as a free and independent people.

### Vocabulary

yoke: to join

## Document B: Jawaharlal Nehru (Modified)

*The passage below is an excerpt from the book The Discovery of India, by Jawaharlal Nehru published in 1946. Nehru was India's first Prime Minister and a member of India's Congress during pre-Independence. Nehru was actively involved in India's Independence Movement, and he wrote the book between 1942-1945 when he was in prison for civil disobedience.*

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Any division of India on a religious basis as between Hindus and Muslims, as proposed by the Moslem League today, cannot separate the followers of these two principal religions of India, for they are spread out all over the country. Even if the areas in which each group is in a majority are separated, huge minorities belonging to the other group remain in each area. Other religious groups, like the Sikhs, are split up unfairly against their will and placed in two different states. In giving freedom to separate to one group, other groups are denied that freedom . . .

If the economic aspects of separation are considered, it is clear that India as a whole is a strong and more-or-less self-sufficient economic unit. If the division is made so as to separate the predominately Hindu and Muslim areas, the Hindu areas will not be so hard hit. The Muslim areas, on the other hand, will be economically backward. Thus, the odd fact emerges that those who today demand separation will suffer the most from it.

The astonishing fact remains that those who propose "Pakistan" or partition have consistently refused to define what they mean or to consider the implications of such a division. They move on the emotional plane only . . .

It is difficult to imagine any free state emerging from such **turmoil**, and if something does emerge, it will be full of contradictions and **insoluble** problems.

### Vocabulary

turmoil: confusion and uncertainty  
insoluble: can't be dissolved

## Document C: Lord Louis Mountbatten (Modified)

*The excerpt below is from an interview with Lord Louis Mountbatten, the last British leader of India. The interview was recorded over 20 years after the partition of India. The excerpt presents Mountbatten's views on Muhammad Ali Jinnah, who died somewhat suddenly of tuberculosis on September 11, 1948.*

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You see, Jinnah was so much of a one-man band. If somebody had told me he's going to be dead in a few months would I then—I am asking myself this question now—would I have said, Let's hold India together and not divide it? . . . Most probably . . . Jinnah was a lunatic. He was absolutely, completely impossible. I don't think we could have waited for him to die because, I don't think . . . we neither could have afforded the time, nor could we have felt certain of it. But what we could have done is to argue with him in a very different way. I assumed I was dealing with a man who was there for keeps, and had Pakistan as his object on which I couldn't steer him around. If in fact, we suppose for a moment that Jinnah had died, literally before the transfer of power, I believe the [Indian] Congress would have been so relieved that their arch enemy was dead—we would have been dealing on a basis where Congress would have been prepared to give up much more and the other Muslim leaders would have been ready to accept that. It's a horrifying thought that we were never told . . . Anyway, that I wasn't told [that Jinnah was dying], was almost criminal. The only chance, and I'm saying this now on the spur of the moment, it was the only chance we had of keeping some form of unified India, because he was the only, I repeat the only, stumbling block. The others were not so **obdurate**. I am sure the Congress would have found some compromise with them.

### Vocabulary

obdurate: stubborn

## Document D: Stanley Wolpert (Excerpt)

*Stanley Wolpert is an American historian specializing in Indian history. The following excerpt is from the introduction of Wolpert's book, Shameful Flight: The Last Years of the British Empire in India, published in 2006, in which he expresses his views on India's partition. Wolpert has made several trips to India.*

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In mid-August of 1947 the world's mightiest modern empire [Great Britain] . . . abandoned its vow to protect one-fifth of humankind . . .

Prime Minister Clement Attlee and his cabinet gave Mountbatten until June of 1948 to try to **facilitate** agreement between the major competing political party leaders of India to work together within a single federation. But adrenaline-charged Mountbatten **scuttled** that last best hope of the British Imperial *Raj* . . . to leave India a single independent government, deciding instead to divide British India into fragmented **dominions** of India and Pakistan. The hastily and **ineptly** drawn lines of partition of North India's two greatest provinces, Punjab and Bengal, slashed through their multicultural heartlands . . .

. . . the tragedy of Partition and its more than half century legacy of hatred, fear and communal conflict . . . might well have been avoided, or at least **mitigated**, but for the arrogance and ignorance of a handful of British and Indian Leaders. Those ten additional months of post war talks, aborted by an impatient Mountbatten, might have helped all parties to agree that cooperation was much wiser than conflict, dialogue more sensible than division, words easier to cope with and pay for than perpetual warfare . . .

### Vocabulary

facilitate: to make a process easier

scuttle: to cause something to fail

dominions: the territory of a government

ineptly: clumsily

mitigate: to make less severe

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## India Partition Guiding Questions

### Timeline

- 1) When was the idea of a separate homeland for Muslims first introduced?
- 2) Who was one of the biggest proponents of a separate Muslim state?
- 3) Why did some Muslim leaders want a separate Muslim state? What worried them about a united India?
- 4) Why might some blame the British for the violence that resulted from Partition?

### Document A: Jinnah

- 1) (*Sourcing*) Who gave this speech and who was his audience?
- 2) (*Close reading*) Why does Jinnah support the creation of a separate state for Muslims?

## Document B: Nehru

- 1) (*Sourcing*) Who wrote this document? What do you suppose his purpose was in writing a book about India at this time?
  
- 2) (*Close reading*) What are two reasons the speaker opposes the creation of a separate state for Muslims?
  
- 3) (*Close reading*) What does Nehru mean when he accuses the supporters of a separate Pakistan of moving on the “emotional plane”?
  
- 4) (*Contextualization*) Both Jinnah and Nehru are writing *before* Great Britain has granted India independence. In other words, the argument over whether India should be split is occurring against the backdrop of the fight for Indian independence. How might this context have affected what Jinnah and Nehru are saying in these documents?

### Document C: Mountbatten

- 1) (*Sourcing*) Who is speaking in this document?
- 2) (*Sourcing*) What type of document is this?
- 3) (*Sourcing*) When was this document written? Why is this important?
- 4) (*Close reading*) According to Mountbatten, what role did Jinnah play in the decision to split India rather than keep it unified?
- 3) (*Close reading*) According to Mountbatten, why was it “almost criminal” that he didn’t know that Jinnah was dying?

### Document D: Wolpert

- 1) (*Sourcing*) What type of document is this?
- 2) (*Sourcing*) How does this source differ from all the others? Do you think it’s more or less reliable? Explain.
- 3) (*Close reading*) According to Wolpert, who was responsible for the failure of partition? Explain.

Name\_\_\_\_\_

**Was India's Partition Plan a good decision given what people knew at the time?**

**ROUND 1**

<i>Document</i>	<i>Based on this document, was India's Partition Plan a good decision?</i>	<i>Evidence from document to support these reasons</i>
<b>A: Jinnah</b>		
<b>B: Nehru</b>		

**Claim: Was India's Partition Plan a good decision given what people knew at the time?**

**Was India's Partition Plan a good decision given what people knew at the time?**

**ROUND 2**

<i>Document</i>	<i>Based on this document, was India's Partition Plan a good decision?</i>	<i>Evidence from document to support these reasons</i>
<b>C: Mountbatten</b>		
<b>D: Wolpert</b>		

**Final Claim: Was India's Partition Plan a good decision given what people knew at the time?**